

APPEARANCE IN THE WORKPLACE

1. PURPOSE: To establish standards of professional appearance and grooming at VA Central Iowa Health Care System (VACIHCS), including Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) and other facilities whether owned or leased that are under the control of VACIHCS, that project pride and professionalism to the Veterans and customers served by the health care system. This policy covers all employees, volunteers, work-study students and contract personnel, while in an official status at, or on behalf of, VACIHCS. Services/Service Lines may develop appearance policies to meet their specific needs or requirements. These must be developed in accordance with this policy, with concurrence of the executive team member in their chain of command, and negotiated with the exclusive representative of the affected bargaining-unit employees.

2. POLICY: All individuals representing the organization will wear appropriate clothing suitable to the professional health care environment, and will maintain standards of personal hygiene and grooming that promote safety and support efforts towards infection prevention and control. Personal appearance contributes to the overall image of VACIHCS while carrying out VA's mission to provide exceptional health care that improves Veterans health and wellbeing. All employees, volunteers, work-study students, and contract employees will be furnished a copy of this policy. New employees will be furnished a copy of this policy during New Employee Orientation.

3. ACTION:

a. Responsibilities:

(1) Supervisors and managers are responsible for educating their employees regarding the requirements of this policy, as well as monitoring their employees' appearance and addressing instances of noncompliance with this policy. Such discussions will be conducted in a private setting, away from other employees, Veterans, and visitors. Supervisors will follow the procedures described in the compliance section of this policy.

(2) Employees, volunteers, work-study students and contract personnel are responsible for understanding and adhering to the guidelines contained in this policy. They will be aware of appearance expectations of their work areas and are required to meet those expectations. If they have questions about the appropriateness of any particular item, they will seek clarification from their supervisor.

b. Procedures:

(1) Employees are expected to wear clothing that is permissible for the professional health care environment and to present themselves in a manner that demonstrates respect stakeholders, and that reflects positively on VACIHCS.

(2) All employees, volunteers, work-study students and contract personnel are expected to present a clean and neat appearance.

(3) Individual Services/Service Lines may develop policies more specific than the standards outlined below; those may include the wearing of a specific uniform that is considered generally accepted professional attire. In these instances, the appropriate union official(s) will be notified of the proposed policy and afforded the right to represent and negotiate on behalf of the bargaining unit employees affected by the proposed policy.

(4) Employees required to wear uniforms shall wear all elements of the uniforms as prescribed while in a duty status. If the employee is required to wear a lab coat or smock, clothing worn under that must meet the standards outlined in this policy.

(5) Employees must follow the Service/Service Line guidelines for their work areas, especially where safety and infection prevention and control are a consideration.

(6) The following are VACIHCS standards for personal appearance:

(a) The following provides general guidance regarding what VACIHCS considers to be permissible attire for the professional health care environment:

- 1) All clothing must be clean, neat and in good repair;
- 2) Jackets, sweaters, polo-type collared shirts, dress or business casual shirts, tops, or blouses;
- 3) Dress slacks, business casual slacks, or denim other than the color blue;
- 4) Dresses and/or skirts;
- 5) Dress capris that are not shorter than mid-calf;
- 6) Leggings under a long blouse/top, dress or skirt that comply with the above stipulations;
- 7) All shoes must be in good repair;
- 8) Dress shoes, casual dress shoes, tennis shoes, and open toe shoes allowed for administrative positions;
- 9) Employees whose duties routinely involves physical labor should wear shoes that will offer appropriate support and protection.
- 10) Identification badges must be worn above the waist at all times with the employee's name and photograph clearly visible.

(b) The following provides general guidance regarding what VACIHCS considers inappropriate attire for the professional health care environment:

- (1) Clothing that is unkempt, sheer and/or revealing, tight, exhibits excessive wear, torn or patched clothing, or clothing that is excessively baggy;

- (2) Blue denim, athletic warm-up/jogging suits, sweatshirts, T-shirts, shorts, spandex;
- (3) Hats/caps, unless specified in a Service/Service Line policy;
- (4) Buttons or clothing displaying partisan political advertising and/or slogans are not permitted;
- (5) Shoes that present a hazard with respect to infection prevention or control, are unsafe, or are not in good repair, are prohibited.

(7) The following are VACIHCS standards for personal hygiene:

- (a) All employees are responsible for being neat and well-groomed while on duty. Each employee must wear clean clothing every day. Good hygiene (clean hair and body) is a daily requirement.
- (b) The use of cologne/perfume/after shave/perfumed hand and/or body lotion and hair spray is not recommended in either patient care or administrative areas in order to protect those individuals with sensitivity to these types of odors. This will be addressed by managers on an individual basis, if offensive to patients, visitors or staff.
- (c) All nail polish will be intact and nails groomed.
- (d) Hair is to be clean and well groomed.

(8) Exceptions:

- (a) General exceptions may be made during periods of inclement weather, in recognition of special events, or during performance of duties not typically associated with a particular position, or at the discretion of management prior to the clothing being worn. Employees not issued uniforms, but whose work routinely involves physical labor, should wear clothing appropriate to their work, consistent with other guidance contained in this policy.
- (b) Religious exceptions may be made on an individual basis.
- (c) Medical exceptions will require a provider's statement that includes a time period for the exception.

(9) Additional Considerations:

- (a) Body piercing and tattoos will not interfere with the individual's ability to accomplish their work or detract from a positive experience for other stakeholders and, if practical, should not be readily visible during the employee's on duty time. Tattoos that could be considered offensive (sexually, political or racially) should be covered at all times.

(b) Jewelry will not present a safety hazard; and clothing that may represent a safety hazard (scarves, neckties, etc.) during specific patient encounters will be evaluated and, when appropriate, removed prior to the encounter.

4. COMPLIANCE:

a. When the appearance of an employee conflicts with the established appearance policy, a good faith effort will be made with the employee, supervisor and union representative (if requested) to resolve the conflict at the lowest level.

b. Both the union and management recognize there may be differences of opinion concerning what is “appropriate”. The principles of this policy will serve as a guide in resolving these differences.

c. If necessary, supervisors may authorize annual leave and/or grant leave without pay sufficient for the employee to go home and return to duty or for the employee to wear scrubs if/as appropriate, in response to the first offense. Subsequent non-compliance will result in counseling and/or progressive discipline in accordance with disciplinary policy/provisions.

5. REFERENCES: NMHR6 Nursing Memorandum, Uniform Policy.

6. RESCISSION: Appearance in the Workplace, Workforce Memo – 36, January 2015.

7. REVIEW AND RESPONSIBILITY: The Associate Director is responsible for the contents of this policy which will be reviewed and reissued on or before July 2020.

GAIL L. GRAHAM
Director

Distribution: VACIHCS Policies SharePoint site